

Set It Straight!

by DenytEnAmun

This article discusses Set as portrayed in ancient Egypt and as understood in the modern day Temple of Set. This was DenytEnAmun's first article on Set. Every Setian is sooner or later bound to form some sort of opinion on the entity whose name s/he has taken as a part of her/himself. Whether Set exists or not, and what should we think about his Priesthood, are two of the bunch of very frequently discussed issues in the Temple. The lack of empirically testifiable evidence gives these questions an aura of perennial problems. Sometimes the possibility of Set's existence has been tried to be refuted on the basis that we cannot know about it, that all attempts at apprehending him are mere mystical nonsense. What more, profane society - if it is at all familiar with Set the Egyptian god - knows him as an envious and savage murderer, sexual pervert, and what not that seems to justify condemning his 'followers' as sneaky 'devil worshippers'.

This sketchy article will focus on whether there is any evidence to support our image of Set as the universal god of consciousness and non-nature (the particularizations of which we in a way are) -- not the butcher of Osirian myth. In his lucid account *Seth: the God of Confusion*, H. Te Velde states that the meaning of the name of Set is uncertain by modern etymological standards. This in mind we may examine some of the pseudo-etymologies. Plutarch offers 'the overmastering' or 'overpowering', and then indicates that in many cases the name may mean 'turning back' or 'overpassing'. No Egyptian speculation supports the latter meaning directly. Te Velde suggests that the Egyptian theologian would have agreed with the first meaning as it goes hand in hand with Set's mythological function. In the Coffin Texts (of the Middle Kingdom) the first meaning might have been avoided by substituting the Set-animal by a sign that means 'to separate'. This sign later fell into disuse, but Te Velde says the meaning of Set as 'the god set apart' or 'the god who separates' was carried on.

"The Seth-animal functions as a determinative for words indicating concepts divergent from the normal order, which to the Egyptian mind was given by gods and is guarded by them, and it has a negative meaning." (p. 24) In *Gods of the Egyptians* (part II: p. 244) Budge puts it that Set was generally thought to be the cause of every thing which tended to reverse the ordinary course of nature and of law and order. From a moral point of view he was thus the personification of sin and evil. Recalling what Serge Sauneron's *The Priests of Ancient Egypt* has to say about the Egyptian world-view, the negative connotations become understandable. Sauneron explains that the Egyptians thought that "the universe, predetermined since its creation, has been organized for all eternity according to patterns unvaryingly alike" (p. 29), and that holding up this balance is indispensable, moreover not by 'inventing' new solutions when difficulties

arise, but rather by seeking the already existing remedy from old texts. (p. 119) Rostislav Holthoer, the professor of Egyptology in the University of Uppsala (in Sweden), who teaches the subject also in Helsinki University, mentioned on one class that "The 'nefer' of the people was to particularize the neteru, thus to uphold Ma'at, the universal order. This was felt to be just, good and purposeful."

According to Te Velde Set's (and Nephthys') birth was the beginning of confusion. Set caused disorder even before his name existed, and disturbed the regular processes of creation [as reflected in his allegedly disorderly birth; Plutarch: "not in due season or manner, but with a blow he broke through his mother's side and leapt forth".] Te Velde observes that this is in keeping with Set's unpredictable and violent nature. While discussing the significance of Set's testicles he comes to a like-minded opinion: "The testicles of Set represent the savage, elementary, yet undifferentiated urges ..." He seeks to establish that Set was a sort of inevitable disorder in order, whose myths render possible experiencing unacceptable things within fixed bounds. Set would thus be a "'spirit of disorder'... the lord of unbridled forces in nature and in civilization." (p. 56) Set, the antisocial god, cut off from the community of the gods?

Well, Set does not really fit into the established view, that seems clear. The de Lubicz [See #2L, S] interpretation of Set as per the premise that the aim of Egyptian religion was a conscious return to the Cause/Source, is that Set is the principle of concreteness, fixation, and separation. He represents "the fall into nature" ('Sethian affirmation of duality'), materiality, and in general everything that de Lubicz considers animalistic. This is a very Osirian (or 'Horian' as she might call it) interpretation and sounds as if she rather forcibly tried to integrate Set into her scheme.

Personally I think Te Velde has a good point, for non-Setians might indeed have tried to include Set into their world-view (and thus 'negate' his power), or persecute (for the sake of the harmony of the universe!) his Priesthood when this didn't work out. That Set's name was used to denote non-natural concepts (to what was not of the neteru/natural principles), indicates that he originally stood for something that didn't belong to that order. If we take into account that at the very least after the XX dynasty Set's cult suffered a real persecution mania and that in later theology he was reinterpreted, it seems that nothing certain of his original concept has survived. [For hardly would any original Egyptian Priesthood have been a lettuce-eating bunch of bacchanalian criminals?] In the Osirian myth he became merely "the enemy of gods and the murderer of Osiris, the being who revolted against the order established by the highest god." (Te Velde, p. 150) de Lubicz must have seen Set through the Osirian lense. On the basis of this material, however, I think that we are not at all too far out on the limb if we presume Set might indeed have been the god

of consciousness, the meter of that which is the single manifestation of life unbound by fixed laws on this planet. Consciousness has made man unpredictable and often an instigator of confusion, disorder and violence as well [see #17D]. Te Velde says that Set came into being accidentally (p. 29) [as if by "an unknown celestial fusion" ...], and that despite attempts to marry (or tame) him, he remains an outsider. (p. 30) The latter has been true of consciousness, too, throughout the ages of suppression, sublimation and what ever tricks to 'play it out'. But was the whole thing an accident? Set - 'the one apart', 'the cause of separation' - did not fit into the Egyptian all-embracing model, and neither does a distinct and autonomous psyche fit into most non-Setian philosophies. [de Lubicz should perhaps have taken Set, the Giver of the Gift of independent consciousness (which is not seeking to harmonize with the way of Providence, the way of the One), as a kind of 'extracosmic Providence' that she denies on page 132 of #2S.]

The concept of Set in the present day Temple of Set has been discussed over and over again, and so I'll remain content with a scrap on the general subject of the possibility of communicating with him. From an Ouspenskian point of view [#19B, C], Set might be taken as a symbol for what you are not yet enough yourself. If you do not know yourSelf and are not truly conscious of yourSelf, then hardly will you be able to apprehend someone who is defined as the origin of that which is still undeveloped in you (consciousness). It might prove a bit difficult to emphathize with a meter of non- nature in case your consciousness is most of the time in the grip of mechanical/natural phenomena. Even the Bible is plain about this: "He that is of God heareth God's words: ye therefore hear them not, because ye are not of God." (John 8: 47) To fulfil the promise of the Bible (:)), take steps to develop the non-natural presence of Self in you, and to establish its independence of and control over the mechanical objective universe, and you will certainly also increase your chances of apprehending Set, the Being whose very essence is not of nature. [You cannot establish meaningful rapport even with your fellow humans unless you first learn a common language.] From another vantage point, any noetic experiences of yours will probably remain on the level of belief and imagination (mystical nonsense) unless you have trained yourself in sound reasoning also. Moreover, you will not be able to communicate the experience intelligently without sufficient mastery of the domain of reason (and language). This in turn again depends on your properly 'arranging' your soul (Plato's allegory of the state in which all parts do their proper job -- the belly and heart subservient to the head; Ouspensky's ideas about developing a 'Deputy Steward', and so on). I think a most commendable way to approach Set [if the reasoning for the necessity of the influence of Set in Crystal Tablet makes sense to you in the first place] is simply to get on with Xeper. In due time you will most probably uncover new instruments of cognition [learn to think in non-natural categories], which may help you deal with the issue more carefully. Only then can Set really become more than a symbol for you - regardless of whether you conceive of him as an objective entity who in a

way comes to 'dwell within' (energize) you as you restructure your psyche, or as an indwelling potential for development and an energy source within the human mind (a metamodel for transformation). Of course this doesn't mean that you should hide questions in the nearest closet; rather I urge you to think about them, and to discuss them with others. That's the only way to refine your dialectic and to get somewhere with yourSelf.